





Chinese roughs, and the appearance of

another world. The tendency of recent years has been to relax the restrictions placed on Chinese passengers with the view of making the passage as comfortable as possible. The object is a good one, for human nature, as a rule, improves under good treatment. But it must never be forgotten that there are as many villains in China as there were fifty years ago, and that the extended use of European weapons has made these villains more dangerous than ever to the peace of society. So much has been written and talked about this recent piracy case that the idea may have got abroad—it certainly seems to have got possession of the minds of the Government, judging by the apparent indifference they have shown—that its importance has been exaggerated. The contrary is the case. The pirates were doubtless phenomenally fortunate in finding everything turn out as they had schemed, and the *Namoa* may have been exceptionally well protected, but the fact remains that against every attempt of the kind that has been made has been successful. Let their armed men, under a good leader, get on board a steamer, and it will not be difficult for them, unless very great care is taken, to find an ungarded moment at which to carry out such a scheme as was put into execution on board the *Namoa*. Hence the great importance of preventive measures.

No single one of the many measures proposed is sufficient of itself to secure immunity. There must be supervision along the whole line. Well-known dangerous characters—and there is a large number of them in the Colony—ought to be banished. If they return, they should be banished again. We are told not to grow weary in well-doing. Although it may be unenvying to find second-rate return for banishment, the Government must grow weary in enforcing the law. If we carefully watch bad characters in this Colony, the risk of piracy will be diminished, but it will not be taken away. A plot might be hatched in Kowloon City, and the conspirators might easily find means to embark on board the steamer selected, without the police knowing. The next step, therefore, is to prevent armed depredations from embarking on board a vessel. It must be confessed that shipowners and their agents have in the past been far too indulgent. More latitude has been given to the Chinese than is given at Home to European passengers. No one is allowed to enter a railway carriage without a ticket, and in most cases it is necessary to procure a ticket before going on board a steamer. In Hongkong, however, Chinese may embark in any numbers without a ticket, the owners of the ship only being concerned in getting the money for the passage in some way or other. Now, there is no more difficulty in getting Chinese to conform to regulations than there is in getting Europeans, if sufficient firmness is shown. A rule might easily be enforced, that no passenger be allowed on board without a ticket; and if examination should be erected such as exist on the Canton steamer wharfs and almost everywhere at Home, there might be a condition that all tickets must either be got or stamped at the shed. With the exercise of a little care to prevent impersonation, it would thus be possible to observe every passenger before he embarked. There remains the question whether his luggage and person ought to be searched. One witness declared that efficient searching was impracticable. It is not impracticable, because the thing is done at almost every other port, but it cannot be carried out without considerable expense and great trouble. A thorough search would be an excellent preventive of piracy, but it is doubtful if owners would not rather run the risk than endure the obstruction to their trade. If a search were found absolutely necessary, the Government and the steamship companies would have to co-operate in carrying it out. Were the Government to pass a law that all passengers' luggage must be searched by a public official before embarkation, we can conceive of enormous difficulties arising out of enforcement. The authorities would not be justified in taking such a step unless at the unanimous request of the shipping firms of the colony. It is for the latter, therefore, to say whether the rigorous examination of the luggage and persons of passengers is necessary for their safety. Without such examination the worst thieves would only be of value in so far as they would afford detectives an opportunity of closely watching each passenger who embarked, and enable them to detect anything suspicious in his appearance or in his luggage. A similar inspection might be made on board prior to departure, and one witness was of opinion that this of itself would be quite sufficient. But with all these precautions, short of a rigorous search, there is the possibility of a ship going to sea with a band of pirates. Means must therefore be adopted to enable the officers to effectively resist an attempt to seize the ship. One witness suggested that the Chinese ought to be confined in the "green deck," and a man placed on the deck at the access to the upper deck, but another said it was impossible to restrict the number of passengers on the upper deck. The amount of restriction would doubtless depend on circumstances, but, although it may be impossible to rigorously confine the Chinese to the "green deck," it ought not to be impossible to control and watch their movements.







